

News Release

Senator Pete V. Domenici

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DOMENICI: GEN. GORDON WELL SUITED TO LEAD OVERHAUL OF DOE NUCLEAR WEAPONS COMPLEX MANAGEMENT

WASHINGTON -- U.S. Senator Pete Domenici today endorsed the Senate confirmation of Air Force General John Gordon to become the first head of the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), the new Department of Energy entity created by Congress to oversee a massive management overhaul of the nation's nuclear weapons complex.

Domenici introduced Gordon to the Armed Services Committee, which today conducted a confirmation hearing on the general's nomination to be the Under Secretary of Energy for Nuclear Security and Administrator of the NNSA.

"I believe General Gordon is an outstanding choice to be the first administrator of the National Nuclear Security Administration," Domenici said. "This nomination is even more important than many, because he is the first nominee to head this brand new agency. As the administrator, Gen. Gordon will establish the standard for future administrators and in many ways set the course that will determine whether this effort, or any effort, can successfully turn around the management of our defense nuclear missions."

Domenici said he has agreed to push legislation in Congress that would allow Gordon to serve at least a three year term--into the next presidential administration. That legislation is currently included in the emergency defense supplemental appropriations package that cleared the Senate last week as part of the FY2001 Military Construction Appropriations Bill.

"Gen. Gordon will have serious challenges before him," Domenici said. "He must restore trust and confidence in the leadership of our nuclear weapons complex. He must rehabilitate the morale of our scientists and technicians who feel their patriotism has been challenged and dedication questioned. He must modernize a crumbling infrastructure of plants and laboratories. He must restore the elite culture of excellence within the organization."

Domenici noted that Gordon's 32-year military career has provided a broad array of experiences that qualify him to lead the NNSA. He has managed large, technically oriented organizations like the Central Intelligence Agency and Air Force Space Command. He has performed hands-on research and development at Sandia National Laboratories. He has commanded a nuclear missile wing, and worked on arms control at the National Security Council.

Last October, President Clinton signed into law the legislation that created the semi-autonomous NNSA within DOE to manage the U.S. nuclear weapons complex. The NNSA is the brainchild of Domenici, Senators Jon Kyl, Frank Murkowski, John Warner and others.

Formation of the NNSA also closely follows the recommendations of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB), which studied the DOE's management of the national laboratories in the wake of allegations of Chinese espionage. The PFIAB report reconfirmed other previous reports citing security breeches and a DOE managerial system that fostered a rampant lack of accountability at the national labs and throughout DOE.

The NNSA will provide streamlined management for the DOE nuclear weapons laboratories and related facilities, naval reactors, nonproliferation and materials disposition, DOE counter-intelligence and security measures. While its framework follows the PFIAB recommendations, it does not mandate the elimination of the DOE field office structure including the Albuquerque Operations Office.